DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 521 EA 026 095

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TITLE A Professor-Coach Relationship in Educational Administration: Learning To Lead.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; *Administrator Education; *Educational Administration; *Educational Cooperation; Graduate Study; *Interprofessional Relationship; Mentors

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how two people, a professor in educational administration and a graduate student who acted as coach, used the coaching process as a part of collaborative action research. It focuses on the professor-coach interpersonal issues of mutual trust, new learning, and autonomy. The graduate student was an expert in coaching methods and a central-office administrator, who observed the professor's teaching behaviors over two semesters. These coach's learning concerns were also shared by students and the professor: the lessening needs for clarity and structure; the resolution of tension associated with new learning; the working toward mutual respect; the learning to trust of adult autonomy; and the recognition that change needs time. The coaching-learning process, which initially led to stress, pain, and lack of clarity, evolved into flexibility, an acceptance of complexity, and a renewed appreciation for other ways of teaching and learning. (LMI)

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A Professor-Coach Relationship in Educational Administration: Learning to Lead

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April, 1994

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A Professor-Coach Relationship in Educational Administration: Learning to Lead

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Coaching sees itself as a third generation supervision model, extending beyond traditional supervision and distinct from clinical models. Within the framework of teacher development, it encourages individuals to work together to "reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace" (Robbins, l99l, p.l).

This paper describes how two people, a professor in educational administration [EDAD] and a graduate student serving as a coach, learned to collaboratively learn and, in the process, helped others [EDAD students] learn with them. As the two professionals using the coaching process in doing action research, we had to develop over time a shared language with common understandings before achieving collegiality in the pursuit of new knowledge and new teaching skills (Showers, l985). At this evolving stage of the collaboration, the EDAD students -- aspiring administrators enrolled in certification courses -- were not yet full partners in the learning process. Nevertheless, their responsive attitudes and behaviors in-and outside the

classroom were significant, providing us with data from which we could continuously learn.

In this project, the term "coaching" emerged over time and with much experimentation into a collegial and consultative relationship. We deliberately sought to turn a traditional professor-graduate student relationship on its head, consequently identifying the graduate student cum expert in coaching and the professor cum teacher-learner. As educational colleagues, we attempted to create a learning environment in which we worked cooperatively, exchanged information, and supported one another to improve the professor's instruction as well as the coach's skills. That we believe we built a successful collaborative relationship within a typical graduate school department is an important conclusion; but, as you will see, our sanguine ending was in doubt throughout most of the learning process.

Coaching Assumptions and Questions

While we agreed from the outset on three of the learning assumptions in coaching, namely, that (1) people are capable of change, (2) people continue to develop cognitively, and (3) people possess the potential for self-improvement (Costa & Garmston, l992), the implementation of coaching's relational goals of mutual trust, new learning, and autonomy

was not a smooth or straightforward process. In our relationship, questions arose as to the most suitable model of coaching, the assumptions behind the need for EDAD lesson planning, and the level of specificity that the planning entailed. Of continuous concern were questions as to what the coach was to look for; what the professor wanted the coach to look at; and, how the data would be reported [i.e., whether in terms of learning objectives, teaching behaviors, and desired outcomes or simply as raw teaching/learning data]. We discovered that in developing a collegial relationship, many of the prescriptive assumptions about coaching and "good" teaching needed to be openly tested and challenged. In so doing, it caused confusion, strain, and misunderstandings along the way for both of us. To what extent these questions and difficulties were peculiar to our collegial relationship and/or to the field of educational administration, only you, the reader, can assess.

Purpose of the Study

The long term objective linking collaborative action research in EDAD classrooms to EDAD student and professor learning will require many investigations. However, as one necessary, precondition to student learning, the professor stated, "I want to look at my own learning and improve my teaching. If I'm expecting students to learn, then I need to

participate not only in their learning, but in mine as well." The purpose of this article is to focus on professor-coach relational issues of mutual trust, new learning, and autonomy. It reveals the uncertainty behind the professor's invitation to the coach, "to come learn with me."

Methods and Procedures

The graduate student who collaboratively participated on this project was not only an expert in coaching methods, but also, a central office administrator, who had used coaching extensively with her special education staff. After a number of meetings to discuss the purposes of the project and the arrangements for graduate student practicum credit, the professor and graduate student established a schedule of pre- and post-observation meetings and classroom observations throughout each semester. During the first semester, the professor taught an introductory course in School Administration, and, in the second semester, a more advanced course titled the Principalship.

At the beginning of both semesters, the coach elicited the professor's course goals and objectives, his teaching strategies, and what it was that he wished to learn/change. After each classroom observation, the coach would report data of the observation in the post-observation conference (Costa & Garmston, l992; Robbins, 1991). Usually, there were

at least two hours of discussion and two hours and 45 minutes in class each week devoted to collecting and analyzing classroom teaching and learning data. For the two semesters, we kept to this schedule and time commitment.

The following discussion is based on five methods of collecting information: fieldnotes of coaching sessions [pre- and post-observations]; fieldnotes taken during classroom observations; student-coach interviews; participant reflections; and reactions to these reflections.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative information resulted in three categories of EDAD teaching and learning: (1) EDAD student learning concerns; (2) EDAD professor learning concerns; and, (3) professor-coach learning concerns. Our findings of specific EDAD student learning concerns and the professorial teaching/learning concerns deserve more than the brief mention as presented in the following section. Although we have descriptions and/or reflections to support each of the emerging learning concerns, this study is presented as our initial contribution to learning issues in the field of educational administration.

Emerging Learning Concerns

The emerging learning concerns are written as behavioral or attitudinal statements that represent persistent themes emerging from

classroom observations, interviews with students, and our reflections. Qualitatively, they call out for ethnographic inquiries; quantitatively, many of the statements may be deserving of hypothesis testing. We include them here so that the reader can appreciate the range of content covered by the professor-coach discussions.

The most prevalent EDAD student learning concerns were

Time and task management: students' need to manage time and tasks required by the course within the context of their professional adult lives;

Structure and directions: students' continuous need for structure and direction relating to what to do and how to do it;

Evaluation: students' continuous concern for how their work will be evaluated;

and, Content relevancy: students' desire for relevant [i.e., usually defined as practical, managerial issues] and current information as content material.

Although student concerns regarding structure, directions, and evaluation were raised in class, the depth of these felt needs was most clearly heard in statements made during the coach-student interviews. Concerns related to time and task management and relevancy are grounded in adult learning theories, not often part of EDAD courses (Moore & Bogotch, 1993).

The second category of emerging learning concerns related to

professorial learning/teaching. Some were clearly influenced by EDAD student learning concerns; other teaching concerns related to previously held assumptions about "good teaching." These included

Student participation: reassessing the extent of student participation in class as learning activities began to emphasize more (a) group dynamics and (b) individual student options;

Student assessment: assessing the level of student understanding of ideas [beyond memorization and superficiality];

Learning environment: creating new learning environments in which unpredicted [and even aberrant] EDAD student behaviors might emerge;

Content: becoming more aware that previously taught EDAD content material might have to be replaced with new and different EDAD content material, requiring new professorial learning;

Mutual respect: accepting the incongruity between what EDAD students value to learn and what EDAD professors value to teach, and the lack of mutual respect;

Creativity: encouraging EDAD students to engage in more creative learning experiences/performances and having to assess these new results;

Extended learning: providing EDAD students with a learning capacity that extends beyond the timeframes of the either a class or program;

and, **Impact on reforms:** validating both the immediate and longterm transference of university EDAD content as integral to school improvement processes.

Reflecting on these eight EDAD teaching concerns revealed that

significant differences in professorial behaviors occurred between the first and second semesters. We recorded numerous examples of such changes. For instance, the percentage of student participation continually increased not only as a result of the coach's "good teaching" prescription for longer "wait time" for student responses, but also because of increased emphasis on social group learning activities. Another example of significant change occurred with respect to student options, participation, and creative outcomes. At the end of the first semester, a disappointing 30 percent of EDAD students opted to do a creative culminating activity, even though they themselves designed the alternative formats. By the second semester, 100 percent of the students participated, with over half of them sharing their efforts with the entire class.

A third set of issues concerned collaborative learning through coaching. As the main focus of the following discussion, our use of reflective data builds on the "content" of EDAD student and professorial learning behaviors listed above.

> **Coaching model:** the evolution of a mutually understood, trusted, and respected coaching model and relationship;
>
> **Tensions:** the tensions created by planning and data;

and, **Research design:** the need for clarity and structure around the action research design.

Discussion

At the end of each semester, the coach and professor wrote down their reflections on what had happened between them and with students. Each of the three concerns [i.e., the model, tensions, and research designs] originated with the coach. Examples of her reflections are presented "spontaneously" in the first person singular. They are single-spaced in APA style as direct quotes. The professorial responses are based on the coach's reflections. We are sensitive to their written presentations so as to highlight the balance of power each embodies.

Collaborative Learning through a Coaching Relationship

> **Coaching model: the evolution of a mutually understood, trusted, and respected coaching model and relationship;**
>
> **Coach: The coaching process as a tool to gather information assists in the reflective capacity of the action researcher. Yet, I never felt that the professor and I agreed on using this process. In hindsight, I would use coaching only if both participants discussed the process thoroughly. There were other expectations of me, such as to be a collaborator; yet, this is in conflict with the coaching process. In discussing my role, the professor commented on wanting the students to see us in the same light. I did not foresee that happening. I saw the professor as being ultimately responsible for the course content, while my role was to guide the reflective phase of the action research through the use of the inquiry method of cognitive coaching.**
>
> **On a personal note, I find myself more confident to deal with the ambiguities and inconsistencies in the comments made to me. I can now comment back to the professor that he expand on what he means, and no longer make assumptions in regard to statements**

that are confusing to me.

Professor: I never had a particular definition of learning or coaching model or research design in mind when I started. The invitation to the coach was expressed as "come learn with me." Definitions, models, and roles were irrelevant; what was relevant was my/your/their learning experiences. I did use terms too loosely, and that was confusing; but that was neither then nor now of great concern to me. In exploring the learning within the field of educational administration [teachers and students], I was not trying to confirm or test any preconceived notion. My perception of the project was that the model and relationship had to evolve uniquely; the only explicit commitment I made was to try to learn. Of course, as the assigned course instructor, I was ultimately responsible for the class; that's a matter of structure and policy, but as far as student learning or collaborative learning is concerned, I did not believe that it must come from the instructor alone. I knew that the EDAD students would relate to me and the coach differently. My assumption was that combined learning experiences would be greater for all of us than our own singular attempts at learning. This created ambiguity and discomfort.

Tensions: the tensions created by planning and data;

Coach: The professor's reluctance to face issues that he raised or

were raised by the data themselves was a continuous problem. I noticed a conflict between his not wanting to plan and a need to plan and do "housekeeping" chores. In class, he would experience problems with time management and structure. I used a number of different coaching strategies [e.g., expert feedback, mirroring, etc.] and became more supportive of his defining objectives.

I made two significant changes from semester one to semester two: first, instead of interpreting data as I had initially, I presented data for the professor to decide whether what happened in class met his objectives; and, secondly, I added specific questions during each coaching session: What is your intent in today's lesson? What will the students learn? What behaviors are you looking for in the students if they are successful in learning? What strategies will you be using? What are you expecting the students to do? What problems are you anticipating? What will you do? What is the one thing you want me to observe? How do you want me to record the information? Is there anything I should be aware of? Most sessions ended with a reflection on the process itself: What happened during today's coaching? During each session, I would ask the professor to respond to these questions with some detail. I would ask if the intent of the lesson reflected one of the main foci for the course. Oftentimes, the professor got frustrated with this level of specificity and being redirected to his stated focus.

Professor: Yes, I was reluctant to plan and would become frustrated with answering the coach's specific questions. Nonreflectively, I felt that change should just happen; "why do I need the details?" At the same time, I was becoming aware that I was the reason why my teaching remained stuck. I talked about my "rhythm" in teaching, in which I "lost all sense of time." I could see from the data that there were missed opportunities for me to be more attentive to students, but then I would

"start on a topic and not control the stream of consciousness."

The level of planning specificity bothered me, and still does. Yet, from the data, I recognized the possibility that my own lack of planning [structure] might be one reason why my students continued to demand structure. If I provide more structure, would they move towards more reflection? If I listen and respond more genuinely, would they interact more?

It wasn't easy to change; I was comfortable with my old teaching patterns. In fact, I remember saying that I had hit "overload" in terms of meshing content with new instructional behaviors. It was frustrating to accept that I "couldn't squeeze an educational point out of every single event arising in class discussions." I hated to treat topics superficially or be seen as superficial. It was becoming even more frustrating when I began to question the content itself. Without yet knowing what that meant or where any of this might lead, I knew that the coaching process and the action research project were raising issues not previously addressed in my EDAD teaching.

and, Research design: the need for clarity and structure around the action research design.

> **Coach: When I re-visit the data, I have a sense of confusion and gaps in the information. There is no clear explanation of the action**

research design or the plan that will be implemented to bring about desired changes in either the professor or the students. The students were not informed participants in the study, therefore, we did not guide them to reflect on the world they create or to learn to change it to be more congruent with the theories they espouse. We did not even know the theories they used or espoused. There was not an established collaborative process among the professor, myself, and the students that allowed for shared planning, implementation, and analysis. At times, I was not sure if the professor, myself, or the students were the participants or the interventionists.

My recommendation at this time is to use all the data collected so far to support a case study and then design an action research plan to be implemented next semester. The key step in designing the action is to frame the situation. Framing defines the purpose and distinguishes the strategic factors of the intervention plan. The project structure needs to allow for communication of shared goals and an emphasis of the recurring cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and revising. Involving the participants in obtaining valid information will assist in their making informed choices. My concern is in keeping the plan limited so that it has a chance of being accomplished in one semester.

Professor: This is all true. At the time of this study, I did not know how to learn collaboratively. I wanted to collaborate with the coach, and, ultimately, with EDAD students; but learning how to do so takes time and more changes in my own thinking and teaching. I was simply not ready to share or collaborate with the students. What I am most guilty of was espousing my dreams about collaboration long before I was capable of making it part of my actual teaching, learning, and research. I had to learn more about adult learning and to trust EDAD students as adult

learners.

Conclusion

Although we recorded changes in EDAD student and professorial learning, the focus of our discussion was on the professor-coach relationship. What is most intriguing, however, are the interrelationships among all three emerging categories; in fact, our collaborative professor-coach learning concerns paralleled both EDAD student and EDAD professor learning concerns, specifically with respect to (1) the lessening needs for clarity and structure, (2) the resolving of tension associated with new learning, (3) the working towards mutual respect, (3) the learning to trust of adult autonomy, and, of course, (4) the recognition that change needs time. Perhaps, it is this convergence of adult learning themes across roles that will guide the future of educational administration.

In this study, the ambiguity of the learning processes through coaching, which led initially to stress, pain, and the lack of clarity, evolved into flexibility, an acceptance of complexity, and a renewed appreciation for other ways of teaching/learning. Was it the specific dynamics of coaching which brought us to these conclusions? Probably not; for, underlying our coaching experiences was our mutual desire to learn together and the commitment to build a relationship, particularly one that

superseded organizationally-defined roles. When learning is the central focus of a relationship, whether between a professor and coach or teacher and students, then positional authority and the dynamics of power can better serve the purposes of education.

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